CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

Vieux Carré Commission

Guidelines for Exterior Painting

EXTERIOR PAINTING

Exterior paint provides a layer of protection to a building by adding a barrier that reduces moisture infiltration and damage from the sun, pests and other forms of deterioration. This is particularly true in an environment like the Vieux Carré where buildings are susceptible to moisture-related wood deterioration of the exterior envelope and underlying framing. Although exterior paint is an important protective layer to improve the longevity of building materials, it must be viewed as a temporary barrier that is subject to deterioration from cyclical temperature and humidity changes, requiring regular, periodic re-application to maintain its shielding properties.

In addition to paint providing a protective layer, its color can highlight a building's architectural features and style, visually tying the parts of a building together and reflecting personal taste. A building's style, period of construction, materials and setting are all factors to consider when choosing an appropriate choice of paint color.

SECTION INDEX

To protect wood from environmental damage, the Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) requires that all exterior woodwork be painted. To maintain the overall character of the historic district, the VCC reviews the color of all exterior building and site elements. This section includes:

- Paint Properties; Repainting – 09-2
- Complete Paint Removal – 09-3
- Oil & Latex Paints; Stains – 09-4
- Selecting Paint Colors – 09-5
- Guide to Color Selection – 09-6

The VCC reviews proposed paint colors submitted as part of a repainting project or in conjunction with a larger work or construction project. In its review, the VCC works with an applicant to ensure that the proposed paint colors are compatible with the building, site and its surroundings. **However, the VCC will not recommend, or select, a paint color for a proposed project.**

All applicants must obtain a Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) permit as well as all other necessary City permits prior to proceeding with any work. Reviewing and becoming familiar with these *Guidelines* during the early stages of a project can assist in moving a project quickly through the permit approval process, saving an applicant both time and money. Staff review of all details is required to ensure proposed work is appropriate to a specific property.

Guidelines addressing additional historic property topics are available at the VCC office and on its website at www.nola.gov/vcc. For more information, to clarify whether a proposed project requires VCC review, or to obtain a property rating of significance or a permit application, contact the VCC at (504) 658-1420.

The first step in using these *Guidelines* is to understand a property's color rating. The rating corresponds to the historical and/or architectural significance and then determines what type of change will be permitted and the review process required for each property under the jurisdiction of the VCC.

Review boxes provided throughout the *Guidelines* indicate the lowest level of review required for the specified work. Staff can forward any application to the Architectural Committee (AC) and/or the Commission for further consideration.

PAINT PROPERTIES

Paint is one of the most common ways to protect exterior materials, particularly wood, from the elements. When a painted surface has been compromised, moisture and the elements can infiltrate the underlying material and initiate deterioration.

In general, all exterior surfaces should be repainted every 5 to 8 years, with touch-ups of high traffic, worn or deteriorated areas as needed. If the necessity for complete repainting is more frequent, it may indicate another problem such as:

- Presence of excess moisture
- Application of paint with inadequate surface preparation or under adverse weather conditions
- Incompatibility of paint with underlying material or previously applied paint

Refer to the appropriate *Guidelines* sections for information regarding moisture damage to building materials. (Refer to *Masonry & Stucco Painting, Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco*, page 06-11 and *Ornamental Metals, Guidelines for Balconies, Galleries & Porches*, page 08-8.)

Paint problems at exterior woodwork are often the first indication of an underlying moisture problem. The paint below the end of the gutter is peeling off the siding. Repairing the gutter and verifying that storm water is properly draining through the downspout is recommended prior to repainting.

REPAINTING

When considering repainting, the following five steps are recommended:

1. **Determine Whether Painting is Necessary**: Prior to beginning a painting project, determine whether complete repainting is required, or if cleaning and/or spot repainting is more appropriate. By painting more often than necessary, paint layers build up, increasing the potential for future paint failure.
   - Wash with a mild detergent solution and natural bristle brush to freshen a surface's appearance and verify whether repainting is required
2. **Inspect Existing Paint for Cause of Failure**: To ensure that new paint will last as long as possible, a property owner should inspect existing paint for signs of failure.
   - Remove damaged paint down to sound paint surface or to bare wood, sand smooth and repaint

   Some common paint failures are:
   - **Wrinkling:** Typically the result of the top coat drying before the underlying coat
   - **Peeling**: Possible causes are painting under adverse conditions, inadequate surface preparation and/or moisture infiltration
   - **Blistering:** After cutting into a blister, if wood is visible, the cause is likely moisture related; if paint is visible, the probable cause is that the area was painted in direct, hot sun
   - **Cracking or Crazing**: Typically the sign of a hard surface that does not expand and contract with the underlying material
   - **Alligatoring:** Severe cracking and crazing (Refer to photograph, page 09-3)
3. **Repair Causes of Failure**: Before repainting, all causes of paint failure should be repaired. A substantial amount of paint failure is due to moisture infiltration near a roofline, gutter, downspout or the ground; infiltration at a horizontal surface such as window sill and/or stoop; and migration from the interior of a kitchen, bathroom or laundry room through the exterior wall.

   Eliminate all sources of moisture and then repair all damaged wood or substrate material prior to repainting. Remediation of moisture can include repairing a gutter and/or downspout; reducing moisture migration through a wall by installing an interior dehumidifier; directing perimeter drainage away from the building foundation; and removing perimeter shrubs and other vegetation. (Refer to the *Guidelines* sections, in particular the *Guidelines for Exterior Maintenance, Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork*, *Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco* and *Guidelines for Site Elements & Courtyards*.)
4. **Prepare Surface**: To ensure a long-lasting painted surface, appropriate surface preparation should be undertaken prior to repainting:
   - Begin by washing the painted surfaces with a mild detergent solution and a natural bristle brush, then carefully scraping and sanding to a smooth finish, removing any paint that is not tightly bonded to the surface
   - Putty or caulk countersunk nails, window glazing, gaps, joints and openings
   - Allow substrate to thoroughly dry before applying primer or paint
   - Spot-prime bare wood, areas of repair and replaced wood including unexposed and cut ends
5. **Repaint**: Using high quality paint applied in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations should improve the life of a paint job. In general, it is best to use compatible primer and paint from the same manufacturer, and apply two coats of paint to previously painted bare wood.
   - Apply paint during appropriate weather conditions, generally between 50˚F and 90˚F and relative humidity recommended by paint manufacturer, while avoiding direct sunlight
   - Apply finish paint soon after oil primer – Surface compounds affecting adhesion can form within 2 weeks

COMPLETE PAINT REMOVAL

It is important to remember that any method of paint removal can result in harm to a historic building material. Therefore, it is generally recommended that flaking or unbonded paint be removed to sound paint, with complete paint removal only in limited cases. Complete paint removal might be necessary when the existing paint on a surface has completely or substantially failed. Examples where complete paint removal would be appropriate include:

- Where wholesale blistering or peeling of an element reveals the underlying substrate
- Where continuous patterns of deep cracks are prevalent in the surface of painted wood
- When windows, doors or shutters have been painted shut
- Where a smooth transition is needed to a new wood element or a Dutchman repair
- When deterioration of a historic building feature or material will otherwise occur

The paint at this door has alligatored, with severe cracking visible. Paint loss has exposed bare wood. Both conditions allow storm water to come into direct contact with the wood surface, potentially leading to moisture deterioration. In this case, removal of all paint layers and proper door repair are recommended prior to repainting.

This Italianate building has a varied palette highlighting its architectural features. This example is typical of the c. 1870-1890 palette, which includes earth tones and dark red window sashes.

PAINT PREPARATION & REMOVAL SAFETY

Lead may be a component in historic paint, making paint preparation and removal potentially hazardous work. Keep children and pets clear of work area. A property owner should consult a professional for work that is unfamiliar or potentially unsafe.

- Comply with City and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requirements for paint preparation, removal and work at a location where lead-based paint may be disturbed (Refer to *Safety Precautions, Guidelines for Exterior Maintenance*, page 03-16 prior to beginning any work potentially involving lead paint)
- Use caution around paint dust from an old building as is may may contain lead – Wear a respirator and safety goggles, avoid open food or beverage containers in area of paint removal, thoroughly clean exposed skin and launder work clothes
- Avoid using heat tools – A user should always wear appropriate clothing, **keep a fire extinguisher nearby and monitor area of work for *at least one hour after stopping work***

Semitransparent stains and varnishes are not recommended by the VCC because they tend to deteriorate quickly in New Orleans' climate, leaving wood exposed.

OIL & LATEX PAINTS

There are two types of readily available wood paint for a building, oil and latex. Both types consist of three principal components: a pigment, a binder to adhere the pigment to a surface as the paint dries and a solvent that makes the mixture loose enough to apply with a brush. Even though latex was developed in the mid 1940s, oil was the dominant paint type until about 1970 and is found on many historic buildings today.

Oil and latex paints act differently when applied to a surface. Oil paint forms a tough plastic film as the binder reacts with oxygen in the air. The binder can be natural oil, such as linseed, or oil modified with alkyds. Early latex paint used synthetic rubber as the binder, while latex paint today uses acrylic, vinyl-acrylic or vinyl acetate binders. As the water evaporates, latex paint forms a flexible film and the binder and pigment move closer together until a protective surface is formed.

Critical differences between oil and latex paints are that they do not cure in the same way and they adhere differently to substrates. As oil paint ages, it continues to cure and oxidize. It becomes more and more brittle to the point it can no longer expand and contract through temperature and humidity cycles with the underlying substrate. In contrast, latex cures in about two weeks and remains more pliable.

Oil paint generally adheres better to problem surfaces because the oils are small enough to seep into the wood or microscopic openings in old, even chalky, paint. The resins in latex paint are generally too large to seep into the substrate, allowing water vapor to pass through. This makes latex less likely to peel from a building with excessive interior moisture, although multiple layers of paint can create an impermeable moisture barrier. Another characteristic of latex paint is that it can apply surface tension to underlying layers of paint, particularly oil, and pull the paint away from the substrate.

Because of oil paint's adhesion properties and the fact that multiple layers of latex paint forms an impermeable moisture barrier, the VCC recommends the use of oil-based paint at exterior woodwork surfaces.

STAINS

Exterior stains are typically applied to woods and come in many varieties, but visually fall into one of two categories, semitransparent and opaque. Semitransparent stain, generally known as varnish, allows some or all of the wood's color, grain and texture to show through. Opaque stain provides a consistent color finish allowing more surface texture than paint. In most cases in the Vieux Carré, what appears to be historically stained woodwork was more likely grained wood. (Refer to *Wood Graining, Specialty Paints*, below.) However, because of New Orleans' climate, transparent or semitransparent stains tend to deteriorate quickly and are not recommended.

Opaque stain appears similar to paint; however, a stain weathers differently than paint because it does not build up into a thick film that can peel off. Rather it slowly fades when exposed to weather conditions. Fading will be more apparent at a surface that receives more sunlight. Because opaque stain needs to penetrate wood to bond, ideally it should be applied to clean bare wood and limited to a small wood site element, such as a fence, gate and/or shed.

SPECIALTY PAINTS

Elastomeric or Encapsulating Paint

Use of encapsulating paint is problematic because it can trap moisture in woodwork, promote rot and/or provide a desirable environment for pests such as termites. It is often referred to as "liquid siding," "liquid stucco" or "liquid ceramic coating". **Use of encapsulating paint is not allowed by the VCC**.

Masonry Paint

Refer to *Removing Paint from Masonry* and *Masonry & Stucco Painting, Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco*, page 06-11. **Painting previously unpainted brick or stone is not allowed by the VCC.**

Metal Paint

The paint selected must be compatible with the type of metal and existing coatings. In the case of an iron-based metal, typically found at a balcony or gallery, paint preparation should include the removal of rust to bare metal, cleaning the surface and quickly applying a rust-inhibiting primer to prevent corrosion. Refer to *Ornamental Metals, Guidelines for Balconies, Galleries & Porches*, page 08-8.

Wood Graining

Exterior wood that appears to be stained is often wood grained, using primer and multiple layers of glazes that have been textured to imitate wood, particularly an expensive wood. Graining was common in the 19th century, and is most often applied to doors in the Vieux Carré.

Graffiti Removal

Refer to *Removing Graffiti, Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco*, page 06-10, for removal of graffiti on a masonry or stucco surface. Graffiti on a wood surface should be primed and painted as noted in *Repainting*, page 09-2.

SELECTING PAINT COLORS

Selecting paint colors can be a daunting task. There is no single way to pick paint colors, but there are some general guidelines that can assist in the process.

1. **Identify the Architectural Style**: Colors that were intended for a building's particular style tend to show the building in its best light. It is important to keep in mind, however, that many buildings include elements of more than one style, so it might be necessary to define the prominent style when selecting a color palate. (Refer to *Guidelines for Building Types & Architectural Styles*.) A building of a particular style may also have been constructed after the style's typically identified period. In this case, it might be appropriate to select paint colors based upon the stylistic elements rather than the specific date of a building's construction.
2. **Study the Details**: Review the general arrangement and details of the building including the shape, mass, type of roof, arrangement and type of windows, shutters, balcony, gallery and other projections to better understand the role that different colors will play. For example, a white Greek Revival house with white trim appears very different when its shutters are painted with a visually contrasting green.
3. **Understand the Givens**: Some elements at the exterior of a building have intrinsic color and typically are not painted. These elements include brick and stone foundations and chimneys and roof surfaces. Therefore, it is recommended that the colors of the non-painted surfaces be considered when selecting a building's paint colors.
4. **Balance Colors**: It is important to distribute color evenly over a building to achieve visual unity across the top, middle and base, as well as horizontally across each façade. For example, a building with a light-colored base and dark top might appear top-heavy. A dark bay projecting from an adjacent light-colored wall might make the building appear to be vertically striped.
5. **Understand Light and Color**: Colors vary in appearance in different light. Therefore, it is important to select exterior colors in the varieties of natural daylight, in sunny, shaded and clouded conditions, rather than indoors in artificial light. Also keep in mind that the shadows caused by direct sunlight tend to highlight irregular surfaces. This can be beneficial in drawing attention to a unique shingle pattern but distracting if a surface includes undesired irregularities, such as cracking.
6. **Start with the Body**: Begin by selecting a color for the main body of the building that is durable and neutral to minimize fading of large surface areas typically associated with bright, pure color tones. With the Caribbean influence, the wall color was often more saturated and the trim color, doors and windows, a lighter color.
7. **Use Accent Colors**: Often more saturated colors, accent colors, can enhance surface texture and increase visual depth. Because a saturated color tends to fade, it should be utilized for smaller areas where it can age more gracefully within a larger, more muted, neutral body color. Accent colors are not appropriate on pre-1870s buildings.
8. **Experiment**: Before undertaking a major painting project, particularly if contemplating a color change, painting a sample area with VCC approved proposed colors can be very helpful and give a better sense of the finished appearance on a surface in different lights than paint chips.

The following pages include a *Guide to Color Selection*. This *Guide* is organized by periods of time at which various color combinations and treatments were popularized. However, the VCC recognizes that changes in taste and fashion were often reflected in colors of buildings over time. For example, it would not be unusual for an 1830s Creole cottage to be repainted with deeper and more muted colors in the 1890s, and then returned to a lighter palette in the 1920s as the Colonial Revival period was gaining in popularity. As a result, the appropriate colors for a Creole cottage today often include the range of pallets available over the building's existence. (Refer to the *Guidelines for Building Types & Architectural Styles*.)

KEEP IN MIND...

- When adding a new element to a historic building that was traditionally painted, the paint on the addition should complement the historic building
- The Vieux Carré is a hot, tropical environment and its color palette tends to be light and vivid, resulting in greater similarities to Caribbean architecture than to most American cities
- Large areas of highly saturated color can be visually jarring and appear incompatible within the historic context of the Vieux Carré – it is generally more appropriate to apply muted colors to a large area and apply more saturated contrasting colors at shutters and other architectural details
- Colors with the same name produced by different manufacturers are not consistent in appearance
- Color palettes should be harmonious; highlight colors should be restricted to drawing attention to details
- Regardless of style, the floor of a gallery, balcony or porch is generally light gray and porch ceilings and overhangs are painted a light color
- All shutters and associated hardware, including hinges, should be painted the same color as the shutter, and the pintel, attached to the door or window frame, should be painted the frame color

PAINT ANALYSIS

Paint analysis is a useful tool to accurately determine the color of historic paint or finish through microscopic analysis. Paint analysis specialists can analyze a finish sample and identify previous colors to allow duplication, accounting for intermittent fading and dirt layers. Paint analysis is not required by the VCC, but is an option for a property owner who desires an accurate building restoration.

GUIDE TO COLOR SELECTION

c. 1820-1840

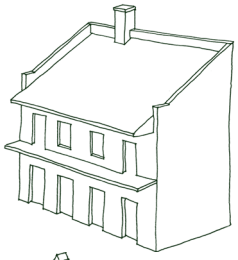
Building	• Whites • Earth tones (ochres, terra cottas) • Bricks often painted brick color with penciled joints
Shutters	• Paris green (oxidized copper color) • Medium range greens • Blue-green • Gray, gray-violet, gray-brown ranges
Trim & Cornice	• Whites • Off-whites (grays and creams)
French Doors	• Grays/creams • Oak-colored wood grained
Foundation & Chimney	• Same color, or darker, than the building, in earth tones
Ironwork	• Black or coated with beeswax

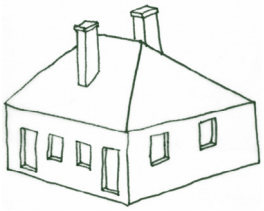
Building colors tended to be white or earth colors. Architectural features were restrained and the colors reflected this restraint. Trim tended to be lightest (whites/grays/creams) architectural elements. More intricate elements are emphasized with alternating colors.

Compatibility Guide

Building Type
- Creole cottage
- Early townhouse
- Center-hall house
- Outbuilding

Architectural Style
- Creole
- Greek Revival





c. 1840-1870

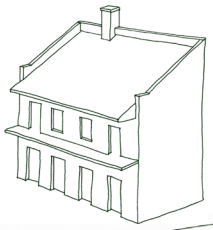
Building	• Deep reds, mauves, browns • Grays, puce, masonry and stone-like colors - simulated marble and granite
Shutters	• Paris green (oxidized copper color) • Medium range greens, blue-green • Gray, gray-violet, gray-brown ranges
Trim & Cornices	• Whites • Off-whites (creams) • Grays
Doors	• Trim color • Oak- or mahogany-colored wood grained, possibly with contrasting graining at panels
Foundation & Chimney	• Same color, or darker, than building • Stone colors
Downspout	• Greens • Building color
Ironwork	• Greens • Black • Browns

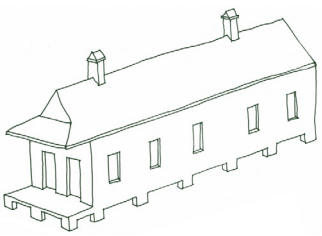
Compared to the c. 1820-1840 period, the colors were broader and deeper and color provided more delineation of details. Ironwork and trim had their own range of colors, allowing more expression of individual tastes. This expression took the form of scoring stucco, delineation of panels in doors and imitation of fine stone.

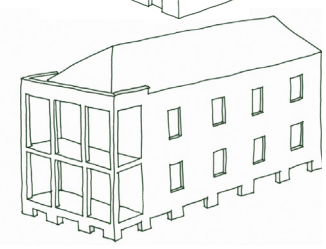
Compatibility Guide

Building Type
- Creole cottage
- Townhouse
- Center-hall house
- Outbuilding
- Early shotgun

Architectural Style
- Greek Revival
- Italianate







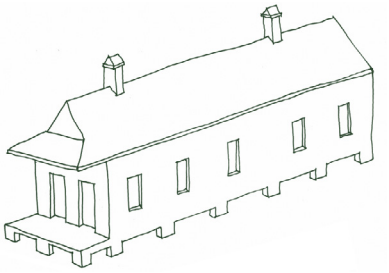
c. 1870-1890

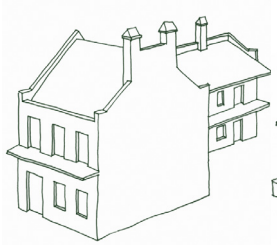
Colors became more muted, if not somewhat darker, and painting followed architectural elements. Architectural elements were more diverse and intricate, and were emphasized with alternating colors.

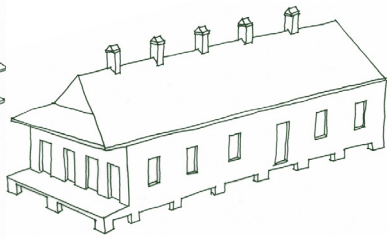
Compatibility Guide

Building Type
- Townhouse
- Shotgun

Architectural Style
- Italianate
- Eastlake
- Colonial Revival







Building	• Browns, olives, ochres • Blues, grays • Rich warm colors
Shutters	• Paris green (oxidized copper color) • Medium range greens • Building color in darker range
Trim, Frames, Brackets, Quoins	• Two colors contrasting with building • Two colors repeating building colors in different shades
Cornice	• Contrasting, or deeper, color than adjacent architectural features
Sash	• Same range as shutters • Deep reds or other accent color
Foundation & Chimney	• Contrasting, or deeper, color than adjacent architectural features
Ironwork	• Contrasting, or deeper, color than adjacent architectural features

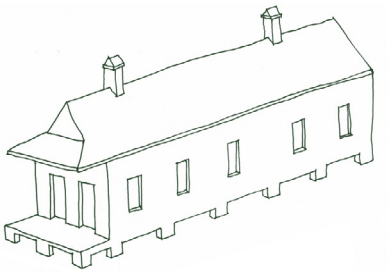
c. 1890-1920

This period saw a gradual return to pastels and white by the 1920s. Colors tended to lighten up, including white with green shutters.

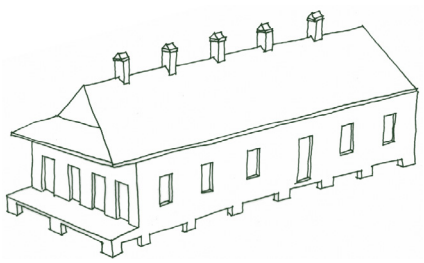
Compatibility Guide

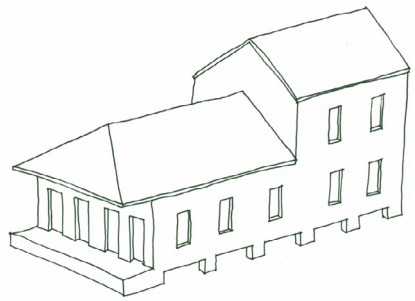
Building Type
- Shotgun
- Commercial warehouse

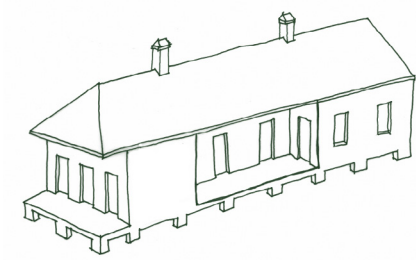
Architectural Style
- Italianate
- Eastlake
- Colonial Revival
- Neoclassical Revival
- Arts and Crafts



Building	• Pastels • Grays • Tans • Whites
Shutters	• Medium range greens • Dark range greens
Trim & Cornice	• Same as building • Whites • Creams • Grays
Doors	• Trim color • Stained and varnished







Testing various paint colors on a building provides a better sense of the final appearance than reviewing paint chips.

Exterior Painting Review	
Remove paint from exterior wood, stucco, masonry or metal; Apply paint to wood, stucco, previously painted masonry, metal or any exterior surface	
1 **2** **3**	Staff
Apply coating or paint to previously unpainted brick or stone	
1 **2**	Commission
3	Architectural Committee

EXTERIOR PAINTING GUIDE

THE VCC REQUIRES:

- Following all City, State and EPA requirements for safe paint surface disturbance, preparation and removal
- Submitting paint and/or finish color samples to the VCC for review

THE VCC RECOMMENDS:

- Preparing exterior woodwork by hand-washing with a mild detergent and a natural bristle brush, hand-scraping and hand-sanding
- Consulting with the paint manufacturer to determine the best type of paint for a specific application – Pertinent issues include the material being painted, location, existing paint or coating and existing chemical treatments, including termite prevention
- Following all manufacturers' instructions for preparation, cleaning, application and safety – Verify weather conditions are compatible with the paint label guidelines
- Using oil-based paint instead of latex-based paint for exterior woodwork unless conditions make it unfavorable
- Investing in higher quality paint – It generally costs more initially, but can last significantly longer, saving money long-term
- Painting downspouts, security devices, light fixtures, conduit, wiring, etc., to match attachment surface
- Waiting 6 to 12 months prior to applying paint to new pressure-treated wood for better adhesion

THE VCC DOES NOT RECOMMEND:

- Applying semitransparent stain and/or varnish on exterior woodwork
- Applying opaque stain on a building element
- Applying latex or oil-based paint on masonry or stucco (Refer to *Masonry & Stucco Painting, Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco*, page 06-11)
- Using a rotary tool – Can leave circular marks and wires can tear into surface
- Using a heat gun or heat plate – Can ignite paint or underlying surface if left in one location too long
- Applying chemical paint remover – Can raise grain of some woods, and be expensive and potentially volatile; Runoff is potentially hazardous and should be collected to prevent harm to children, pets and vegetation and pollute storm water

THE VCC DOES NOT ALLOW:

- Installing elastomeric and/or encapsulating paint at exterior woodwork
- Painting traditionally unpainted material, such as slate, terra cotta and/or previously unpainted brick or stone
- Using a flame tool such as a blowtorch to soften paint – Smoldering sparks can start a potentially devastating fire and lead components in paint can vaporize and create highly toxic fumes
- Sandblasting – Can be abrasive to a surface and wear away a protective exterior coating
- Using a high-pressure water wash – Forces water into open joints wetting interior finishes and structural framing and can be abrasive to the exterior surfaces
- Dipping an architectural element, such as a shutter, window or door, into paint remover – Can result in uneven shrinkage of individual parts and disintegration of internal glue at joints

PAINT REFERENCES

The Staff can recommend references to assist in the selection of appropriate paint colors for a specific property. In addition, original construction contracts as well as Notarial Archives drawings and documentation can provide color information. If documentation about a specific property is not available, referencing properties of a similar design and the same construction period may be a good resource.

This material is funded by the Vieux Carré Commission Foundation on behalf of the Vieux Carré Commission.
www.nola.gov/vcc

VIEUX CARRÉ COMMISSION FOUNDATION
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